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**Draft Woollahra LEP 1995 (Amendment No.66) - Heritage Items
Review of
Submission on 8 Victoria Street, Watsons Bay**

Documents received for this assessment

The following documentation provided by Woollahra Council has been examined for this Assessment:

- Letter to Woollahra Council from Irene and Colin Still dated 17/11/09
- Drawing Set by Colin Still and Irene Still Sheets 1, 2 & 3 dated 15/8/72 and Amended Sheets 1A, 2A & 3A dated 8/2/73
- Drawing Set for changes to kitchen and roof BA 1997/698
- Woollahra 2004 Heritage inventory "Still House" 8 Victoria St, Watsons Bay by Clive Lucas Stapleton and Partners Pty Ltd (Ian Stapleton and Meg Quinlisk) 2005
- Woollahra Contemporary Buildings Heritage Study – Background to the Study by Clive Lucas Stapleton and Partners Pty Ltd dated 19th May 2005
- DA2010/0117 Approved drawings.

Research

The following research was undertaken in the preparation of this assessment:

Site Inspection - Date: 2/06/2010 Interior inspected: yes

Interview with Colin and Irene Still – Date: 2/6/2010

Fibro House: Opera House, Conserving Mid-Twentieth Century Heritage, Edited by Sheridan Burke 2000

Sydney Architecture by Graham Jahn 1997

Architecture in Transition – The Sulman Award 1932-1996 by Andrew Metcalf 1997

Review of aerial photography.

Objective

The objective of the assessment is to review the submission made by Colin and Irene Still, owners of 8 Victoria Street Watsons Bay in response to the proposed heritage listing of their property on the Woollahra Local Environmental Plan Heritage Schedule. The review is to include an analysis of the critique made in their submission of the Heritage Assessment by Clive Lucas Stapleton and Partners.

The Site inspection

- The house has the potential to be classified as a significant example of Late 20th Century Modern architecture. The spatial arrangements and planning which contributed to the building winning a Merit Award, as quoted in the Stapleton report, were evident upon inspection of the property.

- The house clearly has long association with Irene and Colin Still and their family. Both Irene and Colin continue their respective professional work as an architectural illustrator and an architect in the studio of the house.

The Interview with Colin and Irene Still

- According to the Stills the Merit Award has negligible value due to factors such as the close friendships between the juries and the architects nominating their works. They believe the awards were inconsistent from year to year and some Architectural Offices refused to participate as a result.
- The Stills do not consider the house in Watsons Bay to be the best example of their domestic work in the Woollahra Municipality. They designed a house at 76 Queen Street which also won a merit award and according to the Stills is a far better building which gained greater recognition; for example it was published in the Architectural Review.
- Colin Still emphasised that the design of the house was not following one particular style and that he designs according to each job with its own needs and site constraints. The most common element across his designs would be efficiency.
- The Watsons Bay House was originally designed with a different site in mind as the Stills had originally looked for land in Paddington. They also originally wished to build a timber house which reflected the influences of their study in America, however they had difficulty getting a bank to loan money for a timber house. They believe the existing house is therefore a compromised house. They have more recently built another house for themselves at Seal Rocks which they consider to be a much better house.
- Colin and Irene Still object to the listing because they can see no benefits, only restrictions. Since discussing the listing proposal with Ian Stapleton in 2004, they have had development on either side of their house which has affected their sunlight, privacy and has introduced noise; they consequently do not have confidence in Council's development assessment ability.
- The daughter and son of Colin and Irene Still are practicing architects and/ or designers and it is possible the house will be their inheritance. Colin Still feels they should have the freedom to change the house should they wish do so. Essentially they see the house as "a work in progress" for themselves and their children.

Summary of the letter from Colin and Irene Still

Points raised in the submission:

- The statement of significance in the Stapleton Report does not refer to the exterior or its context.
- American forms of Modernism are not appropriate to Watson Bay Conservation Area.
- In the physical description Stapleton describes the contribution to the streetscape as being "dominated by articulated, painted plywood gates and brickwork fence" which contravenes the policies in the DCP.
- Historical and Technical significance are assessed as low significance.
- The building is insignificant in the context of Colin's work as government architect or director of Cox Partners.
- The building did not influence subsequent buildings as they are different in type. Much of Colin Stills work is large in scale whilst his domestic work does not conform to a particular style.

- Aesthetic significance – The exterior has a visually bulky form of low aesthetic significance and no relationship to the plasticity of the interior. Original design was timber based on the architect’s influences from overseas. Not the house intended due to budget constraints.
- Appendix – An explanation is provided of architectural style and their non-applicability to the building. The submission describes the qualities of the Sydney School and Brutalism and shows that neither of these styles have any relationship to 8 Victoria Street. The submission goes on to say that whilst there was an influence of American Modernism it is just a one influence amongst many.
- The house is a work in progress; for example they intend to modify the south elevation. (A development application has been approved for this work DA2010/0117).
- As a building representative of Late 20th Century Architecture it is premature to list it.
- As an example of Colin’s work it requires further assessment.
- The building exterior is not worthy of merit.
- One interior space may have merit but the significance of the interior is not as important in a heritage listing. External views from the public domain are more important.
- The building does not have enough significance particularly in light of its insignificant place in its context.
- The low to moderate heritage significance is insufficient to justify its listing particularly in light of its poor relationship to the HCA.

The Issues

Summary of Issues raised

There are four (4) main issues raised in the Still's submission which are of importance when considering whether the building is of sufficient heritage value for listing on the WLEP Heritage Schedule. These issues are summarised according to accepted heritage criteria. The issues are listed in order of the importance attributed to them in the Stapleton report.

Issue One

Aesthetic value

- Colin Still denies that his work can be stylistically categorised as Brutalist or Sydney School as defined by Stapleton and further denies that these influences can be found in the subject building. Stapleton claims the building is a very good example of Late Twentieth Century Modern style architecture and this is the most important aspect of its significance citing Brutalism, Sydney School and American Modernism influences in the building. The only influence Colin Still does not deny is American Modernism which he says is an influence that is one of many and if it is present it is only clearly evident in parts of the interior.
- The Stills claim that the building exterior has no architectural merit. The overall form of the building is unsuccessful as it is visually bulky and has “no relationship to the plasticity of the interior”¹. Originally the Stills conceived of a design which was a timber structure using ideas and influences the Stills gained from their overseas education and travel experience.

1 Still, 2

- The Stills attribute one part of the interior with potential architectural merit.
- The building itself did not influence their later work although the Stapleton record of interview says that a client subsequently requested the same type of house.² In the interview for this report the Stills emphasized that each house they designed was particular to its site, budget and client and each was therefore unique without a unifying style.

Issue Two

Representative value

- The Still submission raises some serious questions regarding the stylistic influences of the building which together with its aesthetic value bring into question whether the building is a good example of Late Twentieth Century Modern architecture as expressed in the Stapleton statement of significance.
- To be representative a place must be a good example. The submission questions whether the house represents a good example of the work of Colin Still given that the important work of his career has not been domestic scale but rather University buildings, sporting facilities, residential apartments, research facilities, art galleries and museums, hotels, convention and exhibition centres.

Issues Three and Four

Historical association and Historical value

- The Stills believe that further assessment of Colin's work is required. The Stapleton assessment shows that the building did win the Merit Award and it is one of the buildings which form part of Colin Still's body of work. Also the connection of the Stills with the building has been continuous. The Stills have not provided any contrary evidence to show that Colin is not a notable architect. Given the questions regarding representativeness however a further assessment of the body of work of Colin Still is a reasonable issue to raise in order to determine if the historic association with Colin Still is of high value.

Other issues

Contextual value to the Watsons Bay Conservation Area

- This issue is of relevance to whether the building should be a contributory item within the Watsons Bay Heritage Conservation Area but is not relevant as to whether the building should be listed as a heritage item. One of the common characteristics of Modern architecture is the design of the built form as a three dimensional object. Modernism let go of the 19th century type which has clear fronts addressing the street and less architecturally refined backs. Modern architecture can therefore be of heritage significance without fitting into the context of a street as it very often won't relate to the streetscape at all. The issues raised in this regard are therefore of less importance.

Future changes desired by Owners

- Any future changes proposed to heritage listed buildings within the LGA are assessed by Council for the impact they would have on the overall heritage significance of the place. It is important that the owners agree therefore upon the assessment of significance during the listing process.

² Stapleton, 2

- Given that the Stills are the original architects if they proposed changes to the property it is highly likely that they would do it in a way which is as skilful as their original design. The assessment of future development would then need to consider whether proposed changes affect its significance which have been assessed as a good example of Late Twentieth Century Modern Architecture with association with the architect Colin Still.
- Colin Still has indicated he would like his daughter who is an architect to also have the opportunity to design changes to the house in the future. Whilst from the owners point of view this is entirely relevant, from a heritage perspective she does not have historical association to the same degree as her father. This is therefore not a heritage issue.

Should a twentieth century modern building be listed if only its interior is of merit?

- An important issue raised in the Still submission was that the exterior of the building has no merit. This raises the question as to whether the building is listable only for the qualities of its interior?
Elain Harwood (English Heritage) in her keynote address to the conference Conserving Mid-Twentieth Century Heritage described the factors which make a Twentieth Century building listable.
*A building has, ultimately, to work all the way through: to be well planned and fulfil its brief; for this to be realised in the creation of interesting internal spaces and/or a carefully proportioned and massed exterior. Attention to detail is important, and leads to the most important criteria of all – that a building has to be convincing all the way through, and that buildings have a range of factors that collectively make them interesting.*³

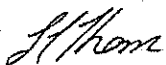
Conclusion

The submission made by Colin and Irene Still provides information which brings into question the proposed listing. It raises pertinent heritage issues which potentially undermine some of the heritage values assigned to the property. These questions are:

1. Is the building a good example of Late Twentieth Century Modern architecture in the Woollahra Municipality?
2. Is the building listable if only its interior is of merit?
3. Is the building a good example of Colin Stills architecture and is it representative of his architectural career?

Recommendation

Do not proceed with listing the property as a heritage item until the above questions have been satisfactorily answered and the significance of the property has been adequately proven through a more informed comparative process.



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³ Fibro House Opera House Ed. Burke 11.